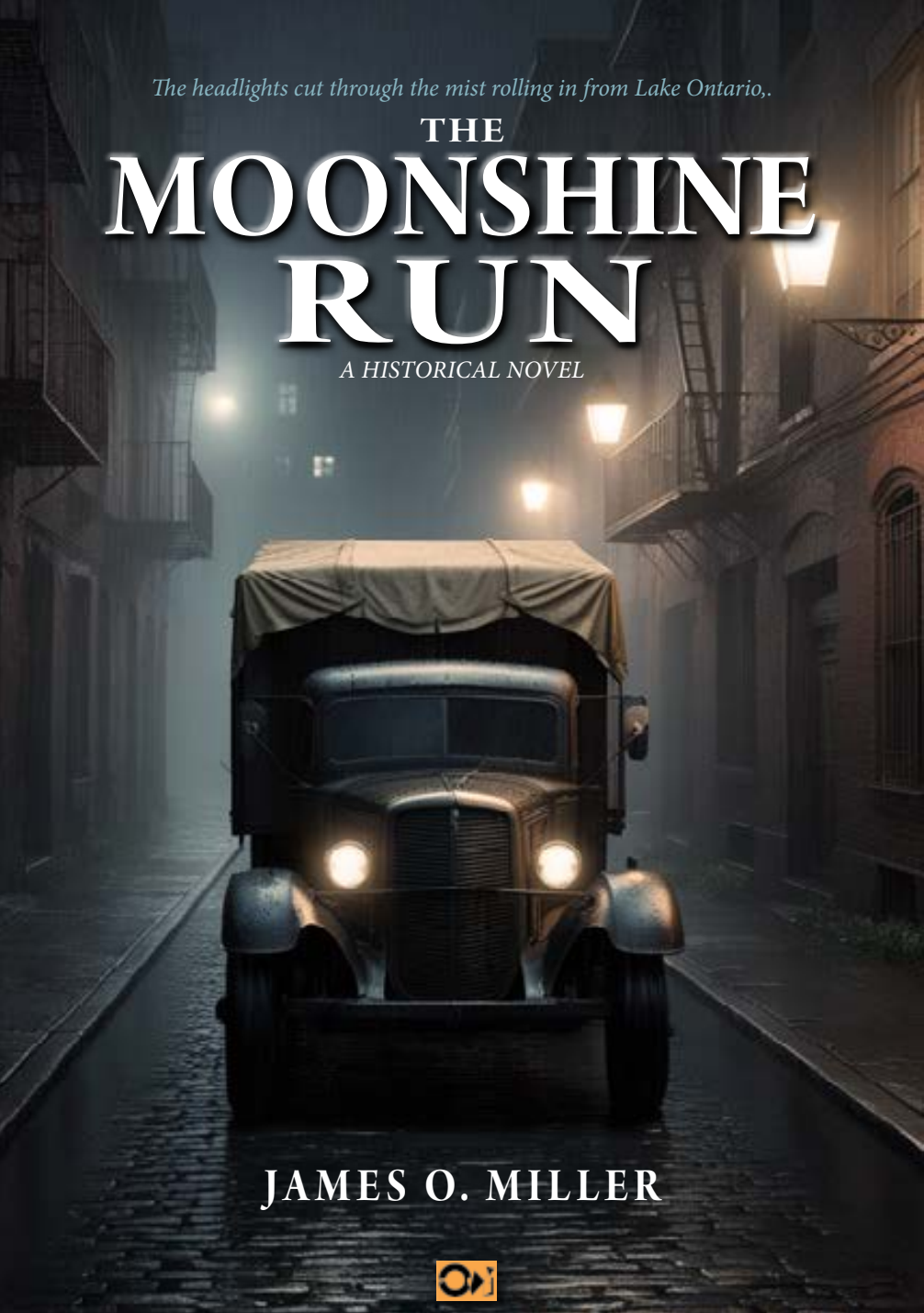
The headlights cut through the mist rolling in from Lake Ontario,.
THE
MOONSHINE
RUN
A HISTORICAL NOVEL
JAMES O. MILLER

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James O. Miller

The Moonshine Run

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Jack Brady gripped the worn steering wheel of the van, his hands slick with sweat despite the chill of the late October night. The engine growled beneath him, a guttural reminder that the old truck had barely survived another winter. The headlights cut through the mist rolling in from Lake Ontario, casting long, jagged shadows against the brick walls of the abandoned warehouses around him. It was quiet, too quiet. The kind of quiet that made you uneasy when you knew you had something to hide.

He wiped his brow with the back of his sleeve, trying to shake off the nagging feeling that tonight wasn't going to be like the others. It had been months since he'd taken a job like this, months of fruitless searching, scraping together whatever odd jobs he

could find, just to keep the lights on and the kids fed. But nothing had been enough. Rent was due. His wife, Mary, was starting to give him those looks, the ones that said everything without a word.

This job, however, had come at the right time.

"Just drive the damn thing from here to Buffalo," the man had told him. "You get paid when you cross the line. No questions asked. It's a simple job. You get the cargo there; we'll take care of the rest."

Simple. But there was no such thing as a "simple" job when you were working for the wrong people.

Jack had heard the rumors, whispers down at the docks, in the bars, even in the shops where men came to pay their debts. Whiskey, the kind of whiskey that the law couldn't touch, the kind that made men rich in the blink of an eye. Moonshine, smuggled straight across the border from Canada to the United States. He wasn't an idiot. He knew what was in the back of that van. He knew that if the cops, or worse, the Mafia, found out what he was carrying; it would be the last job he ever took.

But what was he supposed to do? His two kids, little Johnny and Sarah, needed their mother more

than they needed a father. He couldn't keep them in a place that looked like it was about to cave in on them any minute. And Mary ...she hadn't said anything, but he saw the way her eyes darkened when she spoke to him now. How long could he keep pretending everything was fine?

His thoughts were interrupted by the growl of the engine as the van lurched forward. The tires kicked up gravel as he made a hard right turn, heading down a narrow street that led toward the outskirts of town. A fog had settled in, thick and suffocating. It pressed in on him like a wall. Jack squinted through the windshield, trying to make out the road ahead.

"Get it together, Brady," he muttered to himself, his voice a dry rasp in the quiet van.

He'd been down this road before. Familiar territory, the kind of place where you kept your head low and your mouth shut. No one asked questions. No one cared. But tonight, something felt different. Something in the air.

As he neared the main highway leading south, the van's headlights illuminated the hulking figure of a car parked just off the road. It was a black sedan, sleek and menacing, with its engine running, as if it had been waiting for him.

Jack's gut tightened. He'd been warned by the man who'd hired him, by a dozen other voices who told him the same thing: don't stop, don't slow down, don't trust anyone. And now, here he was, staring at a car parked right in his path, like a warning sign he couldn't ignore.

His instincts screamed at him to keep going, but the engine in front of him was already purring, ready for action. He wasn't sure if it was the fog or the pounding of his heart in his ears, but he could've sworn he saw shadows moving around the sedan.

He put his foot down on the gas, the van roaring to life beneath him as he swerved around the black car, feeling the hairs on the back of his neck rise. He didn't look back. He couldn't afford to. Not yet.

But just as he hit the open stretch of highway, his rearview mirror flashed with light. Red and blue.

Shit.

"Not now," Jack whispered, his pulse racing as the flashing lights closed in. His foot slammed on the gas pedal, the engine screaming as the van surged forward. He pushed the wheel harder, determined to outrun the law or whatever it was that was chasing him.

But he was out of luck.

A screech of tires, and suddenly, a black Buick appeared in the rearview, cutting off his escape. The vehicle swerved in front of him, blocking his path, forcing Jack to slam the brakes. He veered to the right, but the Buick followed, coming up fast, its headlights blinding in the mirror.

Jack's heart hammered in his chest. This wasn't the cops. He knew that now.

The Buick came to a screeching halt just inches from his bumper, the headlights illuminating the license plate, no tags. The door opened, and a man stepped out. Tall, broad-shouldered, dressed in a dark overcoat that billowed around him like a shadow. He didn't even flinch when Jack's tires screeched to a halt.

"Get out of the van, Brady," the man said, his voice low and hard. "You're carrying something that doesn't belong to you."

Jack didn't move. He wasn't stupid. He knew exactly who this was. This wasn't just some border patrol officer. This was someone from the other side of the law. The kind of man who made problems disappear.

"Who the hell are you?" Jack's voice came out shakier than he'd intended.

The man smiled—a cold, cruel smile that sent a shiver down Jack's spine. "Doesn't matter. What matters is what you're carrying in that van. You don't cross into Buffalo with something like that, not without consequences."

Before Jack could respond, a second car appeared in the rearview, another sedan, this one even darker, moving fast, closing the distance. The headlights flared as it pulled up behind the Buick.

Jack's mind raced. This was bad. Too bad. He had to think fast.

Without thinking, his foot slammed the gas pedal again, and the van lurched forward, swerving out of the way of the Buick. The man shouted, but it was too late. The van shot past him, the wheels spinning as it slid across the wet road.

The chase was on.

Jack's heart pounded in his chest as he weaved through the road ahead, the headlights of the two cars still behind him, growing closer with every second. His breath was shallow, and his mind raced, where could he go? What could he do?

There was only one option left. The border. The one place he could disappear.

Jack pushed the van harder, taking the curves with reckless abandon. The roar of the engines behind him grew louder, and as he glanced in the rearview, he saw the Buick in hot pursuit, the other car right on its tail.

This wasn't just a simple delivery anymore. This was a fight for his life.

As the road ahead twisted into darkness, Jack Brady knew one thing for sure. He was no longer just a driver. He was a man on the run. And he was about to find out just how far he could push it before everything came crashing down.

I

The thick, acrid smoke hung in the air like a blanket, suffocating any hint of comfort in O'Hara's Bar. It was a hole-in-the-wall dive tucked away in one of the seedier corners of the city, where the floorboards creaked under the weight of the desperate. The dim yellow lights flickered overhead, casting long shadows across the cracked tables and weary patrons nursing cheap whiskey. Jack Brady didn't belong here, but it was the only place that would take him tonight.

Jack sat at a corner table, his back to the wall, trying to ignore the smell of stale beer and sweat that permeated the air. He stared into the glass of flat bourbon in front of him, his fingers drumming impatiently against the table. The rough-hewn wood was worn, the kind of table that had been around since Prohibition first reared its ugly head, a reminder of the desperation that had gripped this city, and men like him.

His gaze shifted to the man sitting across from him: Nick "The Hammer" Romano. Romano's reputation was etched into every corner of the city, a man who had built a name in blood and silence. Rumors floated about the things he had done to anyone foolish enough to cross him, stories that made grown men shudder and women lock their doors at night. There was no warmth in his eyes, just cold calculation and the kind of silence that said more than words ever could.

"You Brady?" Romano's voice broke the quiet, low and rough, carrying a hint of impatience.

Jack nodded slowly, keeping his face impassive. "Yeah. That's me."

Romano didn't waste time with pleasantries. He reached into the inside pocket of his coat, pulling out a crumpled piece of paper, and slid it across the table with a deliberate motion. Jack's eyes flicked to it but didn't touch it just yet. He could feel the weight of it, thick with unspoken promises and consequences. This was no ordinary job, and deep down, he knew it.

He reached for the paper, unfolding it carefully. It was a short note, almost illegible, but the meaning was clear.

"Drive. Don't ask questions. Get paid. Simple."

Jack raised an eyebrow. It was too simple, too easy. Nothing in his life had ever come that easily, not even close. He met Romano's gaze, trying to read the man, searching for any sign of hesitation, of a lie. But there was none. Romano's face was a mask of indifference, and his cold, dark eyes never left Jack's.

"And what's in the back of the van?" Jack asked, his voice steady despite the unease gnawing at him. His hands were sweating, but he forced them to stay still on the table.

Romano's lips curled into a thin, dangerous smile. "Don't ask. Just do your job."

The words sent a chill down Jack's spine. He didn't need to ask, not really. He already knew. It was the same as the rumors he'd heard in every bar, every alley, every shadowy conversation on the docks—whiskey. Illegal whiskey. Moonshine smuggled straight from Canada to the States, worth more than gold, especially with Prohibition in full swing.

The Mafia had their hands in everything these days bootlegging, gambling, extortion. They controlled it all. But this? This was a whole different level. Jack had

heard the stories of men disappearing, of vanishing without a trace. He knew the risks. But he also knew the stakes. Rent was due, and Mary wasn't going to keep waiting for him to get his act together. He had two kids to feed, a wife who was growing more distant with every passing day. If he turned this down, it might be the last chance he'd ever get to make things right.

He stared down at the paper again, the words burning in his mind.

"Simple, huh?" Jack muttered, his voice low as he pushed the paper back across the table. "I don't think anything with you guys is simple."

Romano's smile faded, and his hand twitched at his side, like he was ready to end the conversation with a swift motion. But instead, he leaned back in his chair, folding his arms across his chest, his eyes still locked on Jack's.

"You think too much, Brady," he said, his voice smooth, almost lazy. "You do the job, you get paid. And if you don't ask questions, you won't have to worry about the consequences."

Jack didn't flinch. He knew how this worked. The

Mafia didn't offer jobs out of the kindness of their hearts. They made sure you understood exactly what was at stake. And if you didn't comply, well, people disappeared all the time. No one asked why.

But Jack wasn't an idiot. He knew the dangers. He also knew the truth, he didn't have a choice.

"How much?" Jack asked, his voice steady, though his insides were in turmoil.

Romano leaned forward slightly, the shadow of a grin crossing his face. "Enough to get you out of whatever hole you're in, Brady. More than enough to make sure your wife stops looking at you like you've already given up. More than enough to buy you a little peace of mind."

Jack's jaw tightened, his grip on the glass in front of him tightening as well. He wanted to ask more, wanted to know exactly what he was getting into, what kind of danger he was really in. But Romano's eyes were like steel, cold and impenetrable, and Jack had a feeling that any more questions would get him nowhere. Not now.

He nodded slowly, weighing the decision. "Fine. I'll do it."

Romano's smile returned, this time with a little more warmth, but there was something dark behind it. "Good. Be ready. Midnight tonight. Van's already packed. You just need to drive."

Jack stood, his knees creaking slightly as he pushed his chair back. He didn't look at Romano as he made his way to the door, but he could feel the man's eyes on his back, watching, waiting. It was a subtle reminder that he wasn't in control of this situation. He was just a cog in the machine, and the machine didn't care about him.

The cold air hit him as he stepped outside, the weight of his decision settling over him like a heavy blanket. The street was quiet, too quiet. His boots crunched against the gravel as he walked to his old truck, parked just around the corner. He wasn't ready for what was coming, but he didn't have a choice. He climbed into the driver's seat, the engine roaring to life beneath him, the familiar rumble of the old vehicle offering some comfort, but it was fleeting.

The weight of the cargo, the money, the danger, it all lay heavy on him now. Jack turned the key in the ignition, the engine purring to life. He slammed the truck into gear, pulling away from the curb and heading toward the darkened streets ahead. As he

drove through the silent night, one thought echoed in his mind.

This was it. No turning back now.

And somewhere in the back of that van, a whole new world of trouble was waiting for him.

II.

The road south stretched out in front of Jack Brady like a dark, endless ribbon, its asphalt slick from the fog that clung to the night. The headlights of the van barely pierced the mist, casting long shadows that danced and shifted as if they had a mind of their own. He gripped the steering wheel tightly, knuckles white, eyes flicking constantly to the rearview mirror. He couldn't shake the feeling that something was wrong, something was watching him.

The van's cargo, wrapped and secured in the back, felt heavier than it should. Whiskey. Illegal, dangerous whiskey. But it wasn't just the weight of the bottles that had his spine sweating, it was the weight of the deal, the job itself. Romano's instructions had been clear: get across the border, don't stop, don't get caught. Simple. Yet Jack had learned over the years that nothing with the Mafia was simple. Everything had a price.

The road wound tighter, leading through the hills and the thick, damp trees that lined the route. The headlights from a car up ahead glowed faintly through the mist, but as Jack drew closer, something about it felt off. His pulse quickened, and his grip on the wheel tightened. Something wasn't right.

He swallowed hard and flicked the switch on the van's radio, hoping for a distraction. Static. Then, a crackle of a voice, cold and direct, came through.

"Brady, you're almost there. Don't stop for anything. Not even for the cops."

Jack's heart skipped a beat. It wasn't the first time he'd been told that in this line of work, but the urgency in the voice made him uncomfortable. His eyes darted back to the rearview mirror, scanning the darkness. The border crossing was only a few miles ahead, but now the fear clawed at him, digging deep under his skin.

Just ahead, the fog seemed to get thicker, like it was alive, pressing against the truck's grill. Then he saw them. Two black cars parked on the side of the road, their headlights cutting through the mist in eerie beams. His foot instinctively pressed harder on the gas pedal. Get through it. Get past them.

Before he could make a move, the cars roared to life. Tires screeched as they lurched forward, fast and deliberate. Jack's heart slammed against his ribs. The black vehicles came straight at him, one pulling to the left, the other blocking his right. His hands went cold, and instinct took over.

"Goddamn it," he muttered under his breath, his foot slamming on the brake.

The van slid sideways, its rear fishtailing as it fought against the momentum. The screech of the tires echoed in the night as he fought to control the vehicle, but the road was slick, and the van's bulk made every movement slower, more cumbersome. He finally managed to steer it to a stop, his hands trembling as he gripped the wheel.

The two black cars had completely surrounded him now. Jack's eyes darted to the driver's side mirror, seeing men step out of the vehicles, tall, dark figures with their hands hovering near their waists. The harsh glow of their headlights caught the gleam of steel, the unmistakable silhouette of a Tommy gun raised at an angle.

"Jack Brady, right?" The voice was low, cold, mocking. The man who spoke took a slow step forward, his

heavy boots grinding against the wet gravel. “You’re carrying something that doesn’t belong to you.”

Jack’s blood ran cold. The man’s grin was cruel, like a cat who had cornered a mouse. The others fanned out around the van, their faces hidden by the shadows but their intentions clear. These weren’t just some thugs looking to steal a little whiskey... they were Mafia, sent to take back what was theirs.

Jack took a deep breath, his mind racing. He couldn’t let them intimidate him, couldn’t let them see fear. He didn’t know who these guys were, but he knew the game. He had no choice but to play along, for now.

“I’m just a driver,” Jack said, trying to sound calm, though his voice betrayed the tension in his chest. “Whatever’s in the back doesn’t concern me.”

The man with the Tommy gun snorted, taking another step closer, the barrel of the weapon almost touching the side of the van. “Doesn’t concern you, huh? You think you can just waltz in and out of this job without knowing what’s going on? You think you’re just the little delivery boy?”

Jack’s pulse hammered in his temples. This wasn’t

a negotiation. The man wasn't interested in talk. The Tommy gun in his hands was evidence enough of that. Jack needed to think fast—one wrong move and the whole night would turn into a bloodbath.

He let his eyes flicker to the rearview mirror again, but the two men in the cars were blocking any potential escape. The window of opportunity was shrinking fast. Jack had a decision to make—and it needed to be the right one.

"I don't know who you are," Jack said, forcing a slight chuckle, trying to buy himself time. "But I do know one thing. I don't want any trouble."

The man with the Tommy gun laughed darkly, a sound that sent a chill through Jack's spine. "Trouble? You're already in trouble, pal. You've got our product, and we're taking it back. Now, get out of the van. Slowly. No sudden moves."

Jack's mind raced. He couldn't afford to show weakness. He had to stay calm. As his hand slowly moved toward the door handle, something inside him clicked. A plan. A desperate one, but a plan nonetheless.

He pushed the door open slowly, deliberately, let-

ting the cold night air rush in. As he stepped out onto the gravel, he kept his hands visible, not wanting to provoke them. He didn't have any weapons, but he knew this part of the city, knew how the shadows could work for him.

The man with the Tommy gun gestured toward the back of the van. "Open it."

Jack did as he was told, moving toward the rear. The cold, heavy metal of the van felt like a barrier between him and the men who were about to take everything he had. He glanced over his shoulder at the man with the gun, then at the other figures surrounding him. They were confident, too confident, as if they thought they had him cornered.

But Jack wasn't done yet.

As he opened the back of the van, he made a split-second decision. In one swift motion, he slammed the door into the man with the Tommy gun, sending him stumbling backward. The others reacted too slowly. Jack's foot slammed down on the gas pedal, sending the van screeching forward, the tires spinning wildly against the wet gravel.

Behind him, there was chaos. A series of curses, a

volley of gunshots. Jack ducked instinctively as a bullet tore through the back window, narrowly missing his head. The van surged forward, picking up speed as he tore down the road, his heart pounding in his chest. He could still hear the shouting, the angry voices, but he didn't look back.

His breath was coming in short bursts, the adrenaline surging through his veins. He had no idea how long the pursuit would last, whether these men were going to keep chasing him until they got what they wanted or whether this would be his last ride.

One thing was for sure: he wasn't going to stop. Not now. Not ever.

III.

The world exploded.

Jack Brady's heart pounded in his chest as the sharp crack of gunfire split the night. His instincts kicked in before his mind could process what was happening, his body dropping low, instinctively seeking shelter beneath the dashboard of the van, heart hammering like a drum. The van shook as bullets pounded against the side, the sound deafening in the confined space.

"Who the hell are you people?" Jack shouted, his voice filled with panic, but he knew his words were useless in the chaos. His eyes darted to the rearview mirror, catching a glimpse of the man with the Tommy gun, smiling coldly as he opened fire, spraying the front of the van with bullets.

"Who do you think?" came a mocking voice from one of the other cars, followed by more gunfire. "This is our territory, Brady!"

Jack's teeth ground together as he cursed under his breath. His pulse surged, his hand moving automatically toward the gearshift, the van swerving as he gunned the engine. If there was one thing Jack knew, it was how to drive like hell when it counted.

The Tommy gun kept firing, a relentless barrage that tore through the air around him. Glass shattered from the windshield as Jack ducked lower, praying the steel would hold up. He could hear the bullets pinging off the sides of the van, the harsh sound of metal being shredded, the staccato rhythm of the Tommy gun keeping pace with his pounding heart.

The man with the gun was laughing now, enjoying the moment. Jack didn't give him the satisfaction. His hand gripped the wheel tighter, knuckles white, as he slammed his foot down on the accelerator. The van lurched forward, its engine roaring, the tires screeching as the vehicle slid sideways, narrowly avoiding a lamppost that had appeared out of the mist. Jack's pulse raced as he wrestled with the wheel, keeping the van on course.

"Come on, you bastard!" Jack muttered, twisting the wheel, praying for an opening.

Suddenly, from the rearview mirror, Jack saw it. The glint of headlights approaching fast, cutting through the fog behind him. He hadn't heard them before, and the ominous presence of the second set of cars became a heavy weight on his chest. The first group of Mafia men had him pinned from the front and sides. Now, it seemed, another group was closing in from the rear, trapping him in a deadly game of cat and mouse.

The van bounced violently over the uneven road, tires spinning in the loose gravel. Jack's hands shook, his mind racing. This wasn't just some small-time shake down, it was a full-on war between two rival factions of the Mafia. He was in the middle of a god-damn firefight.

His eyes darted to the rearview mirror again. He could see the shapes of the new cars coming into view, sleek black sedans, their grills glistening like hungry teeth in the night. Jack's blood ran cold. These weren't cops. They weren't even just thugs. They were made men. And they were all out for blood.

The road ahead curved sharply to the right. It was

his best shot, he could make a break for it, take the turn at full speed, get some distance between him and the two sets of pursuers. He wasn't going to survive this if he stayed in the open.

As the van screeched toward the curve, Jack jerked the wheel hard to the right, pushing the van into the turn with as much speed as he dared. For a moment, the vehicle felt weightless, the tires losing grip on the slick pavement. He gritted his teeth as the van swerved dangerously, then straightened just in time to avoid plowing into the trees that loomed like dark giants at the side of the road.

But the men in the black sedans weren't far behind.

Jack's eyes flicked to the rearview mirror. The second set of cars had already made the turn, their headlights flaring as they closed in. A shot rang out from behind him, the bullet slamming into the rear window, sending shards of glass flying. Jack didn't flinch, not yet. He couldn't afford to.

The border crossing wasn't far now, just a few miles ahead. But the road had never seemed longer, the distance between life and death closing in with every passing second. He could almost taste the cold concrete of the checkpoint, the hope of escape dancing just beyond his reach.

The sound of approaching tires grew louder. Another volley of gunfire tore into the side of the van, the noise deafening as Jack ducked instinctively, jerking the wheel to the left to avoid a head-on collision with one of the sedans. The van skidded out of control, but Jack quickly corrected it, barely keeping the vehicle on the road as he barreled down the winding path. The forest around him was alive with shadows, the thick trees flicking past like the ghostly fingers of some unseen menace.

"Get the bastard!" A voice shouted from behind him, muffled but sharp. The voice sounded familiar, cold, authoritative, like it belonged to someone who had done this before. Jack's blood turned to ice.

It was the leader of the first gang. The man with the Tommy gun.

Jack's foot slammed harder on the gas pedal. The engine screamed as the van surged forward, the fog swallowing him whole. He couldn't afford to slow down. He couldn't afford to get caught.

A loud thud suddenly shook the back of the van, followed by the unmistakable sound of glass shattering. One of the sedans had rammed into him from behind, using their bulk to push him off course. Jack's

body was thrown against the door as the van lurched to the left, tires grinding in protest. He managed to steer back into the middle of the road, but the damage was done.

He could hear them now, the roar of engines closing in on him, the sound of men shouting, their voices mixed with the crack of gunfire. The air smelled of burnt rubber and gunpowder, thick with the stench of imminent death. He could feel it creeping up on him... suffocating, pressing, squeezing.

"Jack!" The shout came from behind him again, a voice full of menace. "You can't outrun us. The whiskey's ours!"

Jack didn't even bother responding. He wasn't interested in talking. He was interested in surviving.

The road ahead opened up, and through the mist, he saw the glow of the border crossing lights, the gates just a mile ahead. It felt like the only place he could go, where he could make his stand, where the men chasing him might finally be stopped. He hit the accelerator harder, the van roaring beneath him. But his victory was short-lived.

A shot rang out from the rear, striking the tire on

the passenger side with a sharp hiss. The van lurched violently, and for a moment, the world around Jack spun as the vehicle veered to the right, its momentum carrying it dangerously toward the guardrail.

"Goddamn it!" Jack cursed, fighting to regain control. The steering wheel jerked under his grip as the van swerved uncontrollably.

His vision blurred with the force of the impact as the van spun, careening off the road and into the ditch. The world flipped upside down, and for a second, Jack thought it was over.

Then, everything went black.

When Jack opened his eyes, the world was spinning. He blinked a few times, trying to clear his vision. The van was on its side, its engine still running, smoke curling up from the crumpled front. He could hear footsteps approaching, slow, deliberate.

Then, a voice, low and familiar.

"I told you, Brady. You should've stayed out of this."

IV.

The van lurched forward, its rusted engine screaming in protest as it struggled to maintain speed. Jack Brady's hands gripped the wheel with white-knuckled intensity, sweat beading on his brow as the headlights of the pursuing Mafia cars loomed closer in his rearview mirror. They were closing in, and fast. He could feel the heat of their engines behind him, like the breath of a predator stalking its prey.

The fog was thick tonight, swirling around the van in ghostly tendrils that seemed to obscure everything ahead. He knew the border checkpoint was just up ahead, barely a mile away, but it might as well have been an eternity. He could hear the unmistakable sound of a Tommy gun roaring from one of the cars behind him, the bullets pinging off the sides of his van, a constant reminder that his time was running out.

"Not yet, damn it," Jack muttered under his breath. His heart raced in his chest as his foot slammed harder on the gas. The van squealed in protest as it surged forward, the tires screeching on the slick road. The fog thickened, swallowing up the lights of the two Mafia cars behind him. It was a race now. Him against time, and him against death.

Jack's eyes flicked to the side, catching a glimpse of a massive oak tree on his left. The road was narrow, barely wide enough for the van, and the trees pressed in close, like a wall closing in around him. He cursed under his breath as the road twisted to the left, forcing him to swerve harder than he'd planned. The front wheels hit a patch of gravel, and for a moment, Jack thought the van was going to flip.

His heart skipped a beat, but he fought it down, jerking the wheel to the right to straighten the van. He could still make it. He had to.

He glanced back again, and this time, he saw it: the shadow of the second car looming behind him. The distance between them was closing fast, and the man with the Tommy gun was raising his weapon again. Jack barely had time to react when the shot rang out, the sound deafening in the confined space of the van. He felt the impact like a punch in the gut—a tire ex-

ploded with a sickening pop, and the van lurched violently to the left.

"Shit!" Jack spat, his foot jerking off the accelerator as the van's front end buckled under the force of the blow. He fought with the wheel, trying to keep it under control, but the van swerved dangerously, the tires screeching as they lost traction on the slick road.

Another shot rang out, this time striking the rear window. Glass exploded into the air, showering the inside of the van. Jack ducked instinctively, his heart hammering as he instinctively slammed the brakes. The van jerked to a stop, its rear end spinning wildly as the Mafia cars closed in behind him.

"Get out, you son of a bitch!" a voice shouted from behind him, followed by the heavy thud of boots on the ground. The men were closing in too fast.

Jack's mind raced, his heart pounding in his chest. He didn't have time to think, just to act. His eyes darted to the side, catching sight of the border checkpoint ahead, the flashing lights of the guards just visible through the thick fog. It was his last shot.

The Mafia men were already jumping out of their

cars, weapons raised, their faces twisted in cold determination. Jack could hear their shouts, but he ignored them. There was no time for a standoff. No time for anything but survival.

He slammed his foot down on the gas again, the van jerking forward, its engine roaring in protest. The tires spun wildly before finding traction, and the van lurched forward with a jolt, tearing down the road toward the border.

"Not so fast, Brady!" someone yelled from behind him, but Jack didn't look back. He didn't have time to worry about them. The border was just ahead, he could make it if he could just...

A shot rang out from behind, slamming into the back of the van with a deafening thud. Jack felt the jolt, but he didn't slow down. Not now. Not when he was so close.

He could see the guards now. The flash of gunfire from their posts, the raised weapons of the border patrol as they saw the chaos unfolding. They didn't know what was happening, they just saw a van barreling down on them, pursued by Mafia thugs, and their instincts kicked in.

Gunfire erupted from the checkpoint as the Mafia cars skidded to a halt, and the first man, one of the thugs from the first car dashed toward Jack, his gun raised, shouting orders to his men. The sound of the gunfire was deafening, mingling with the crack of bullets hitting the ground around Jack's van.

But Jack didn't stop. He didn't slow down. The guards opened fire, and the Mafia men scattered, diving for cover as the bullets hit the dirt and wood around them. Jack's foot pressed harder on the gas, the van's engine screaming as it charged toward the border gates.

The men in the Mafia cars shouted curses, but it was too late. They couldn't follow him through the checkpoint. Jack could see the border guards, their guns aimed, ready to take down anyone who posed a threat. One of the Mafia men raised his weapon to fire, but the guards were quicker. They fired in unison, their shots ringing out with deadly precision.

The man with the Tommy gun fell first, his body jerking as the bullets tore into him. His weapon fell to the ground with a clatter as he dropped like a ragdoll, the blood pooling beneath him.

The other Mafia men hesitated for just a moment

too long, and in that instant, Jack surged forward, his foot slamming the accelerator all the way to the floor. The van roared like a beast freed from its cage, the engine howling as it hurtled toward the open gates of the border checkpoint.

The guards stepped aside, their guns still trained on the remaining Mafia men as they scattered, their chances gone. Jack didn't even look back. He had no time to waste. His van shot through the gates, the world outside a blur of lights and shadow. He could hear the shouting behind him, the curses of the men who had been chasing him, but he didn't stop.

He didn't stop until he was past the border, the flashing lights of the checkpoint growing fainter in his rearview mirror. The Mafia men were left behind, scattered in the wake of the chaos, but Jack knew it wasn't over. He could still feel their eyes on him, the weight of their anger pressing down on him, even from miles away.

He wasn't out of the woods yet. He had escaped this time, but he could already hear the distant rumble of pursuit. And Jack knew deep in his gut that the worst was yet to come.

V.

The faint glow of dawn barely touched the edges of the horizon as Jack Brady's van crept toward the abandoned farmhouse at the edge of the woods. His head throbbed with the pain of exhaustion and the adrenaline that had coursed through him all night. Every inch of his body ached, his clothes were torn, and his knuckles were raw from gripping the steering wheel for dear life. But he was still alive, and as much as he wished he could let the weight of everything that had happened settle, he knew he wasn't out of the woods yet.

He brought the van to a halt in front of a rusted metal gate, the sound of gravel crunching beneath the tires a familiar comfort. This was it. The safe house, the last place on earth where he could rest and try to piece together what the hell was going on. It had taken him longer than expected, the fog and the shattered pieces of his mission threatening to take him down at every turn, but here he was.

He stepped out of the van slowly, his legs unsteady, his body feeling like it was on the verge of collapsing. The smell of dust and damp wood filled the air, and the faint sound of birds beginning to chirp in the distance only reminded him that there was no escape from the madness that had consumed his life.

A figure stepped out of the shadows, and Jack's breath caught in his throat. The man was tall, broad-shouldered, with a thick mustache and a scar that ran jagged across his cheek. His eyes were cold and calculating, a man who had seen too much of the world's darkness to be easily impressed.

"You made it," the man said, his voice low and rough. "That's more than I can say for the rest of them."

Jack didn't have the strength for small talk. His hands were shaking as he fumbled with the keys, tossing them to the man. "The van's yours. Take it. Get the cargo where it needs to go."

The man caught the keys and examined them for a moment before meeting Jack's gaze. There was a flicker of something in his eyes, but it was gone too quickly to read. "You did good, Brady. Better than I expected. But don't think for a second you're out of

this. The boys from both sides won't forget what happened tonight."

Jack exhaled, his breath ragged. The weight of the situation was heavier than he could process. "I didn't ask for this," he muttered, more to himself than to the man in front of him. "Just trying to feed my family."

The man's lips twisted into something resembling a smile, but it didn't reach his eyes. "We all have our reasons. But you're in it now. You can't walk away, not unless you've got a death wish."

Jack's stomach tightened, a cold sweat breaking out across his back. "What do you mean, 'in it now'?" he asked, his voice strained.

The man motioned for Jack to follow him inside the farmhouse. "I think you'll want to hear this," he said cryptically.

Inside, the air was thick with smoke, the faint smell of stale whiskey and cheap cigars hanging in the air. A table covered in maps and documents lay in the center of the room, and several other men stood around, speaking in low voices. The tension in the room was palpable, and Jack could feel the eyes of the others on him as he entered.

"You're not the only one carrying something important tonight," the man with the scar continued, gesturing to the table. "You might have been just a delivery boy, but those bottles of whiskey were never just about booze. They were a message."

Jack's mind reeled, but he kept his composure. "A message?" he repeated, his voice rough. "Who the hell am I delivering a message for?"

The man with the scar didn't answer directly. Instead, he moved to the table and picked up a large envelope, sliding it across to Jack. "This came through channels you don't want to know about. But the thing is, you were just a pawn, Brady. A pawn in a game far bigger than you can imagine."

Jack tore open the envelope, his eyes scanning the contents. Maps. Names. Numbers. It made no sense. His eyes shot back up to the man. "What is this? What the hell is going on?"

Before the man could respond, the sound of a car engine revving outside caught their attention. A low hum, the unmistakable sound of a black sedan speeding down the dirt road toward the farmhouse. The men inside the room stiffened, their hands inching toward their weapons. Jack felt a knot form in his stomach.

"Trouble," the man with the scar said flatly, his eyes narrowing. "Didn't take them long to find us."

Jack's pulse quickened. He knew this wasn't just a random visit. He wasn't about to walk away from this, not without being dragged deeper into whatever hell he'd stumbled into.

"We've got company," Jack muttered, his eyes darting toward the window. The car was getting closer, its headlights blinding in the stillness of the morning. The sound of it grew louder as it approached, the gravel crunching under the tires.

The door slammed open before anyone could make a move, and two men stepped inside, their guns raised. They were dressed in black suits, their faces hard and unyielding.

"We're here for the cargo," one of them said, his voice cold and authoritative. He didn't bother with introductions. "Now."

The tension in the room was unbearable. Jack's heart raced, the realization sinking in that everything was spiraling out of control. This wasn't just a robbery. This wasn't just a Mafia squabble. This was war.

The man with the scar didn't flinch. "You want the cargo?" he asked, his voice like ice. "You're going to have to go through us."

Jack didn't have time to think. The gunfire erupted in the small room, sharp and sudden. The sound of bullets ricocheted off the walls, and the air was thick with the acrid smell of gunpowder. One of the men in black dropped immediately, his body crumpling to the floor as the others returned fire.

Jack hit the ground, scrambling for cover behind the table as more shots rang out. He could hear the men shouting, cursing each other as the battle unfolded in front of him. It was chaos. Pure, unbridled chaos.

He was a pawn no longer. The game had changed. And Jack Brady was about to take control.

Rolling to the side, Jack grabbed a nearby gun, the cold steel heavy in his hands. He didn't know how to use it well, but in the moment, he didn't need to. He raised it instinctively, his eyes locking onto the man who had first spoken, who was now aiming at the scarred man.

Without thinking, Jack fired.

The shot hit its mark, the man crumpling as the bullet tore through his chest. Jack couldn't stop to think about it. He had to move, had to survive. He ducked back down behind cover as the firefight escalated, the room becoming a blur of bodies, shouting, and bullets.

Through the chaos, Jack saw the man with the scar make a move toward the door, yelling for him to follow. "We don't have much time. Get the hell out of here!"

Without hesitation, Jack sprinted after him, his heart pounding in his chest. He couldn't think about the carnage behind him. All that mattered now was escaping. The war was far from over, and Jack Brady was in the middle of it, with no way out but forward.

As they reached the door, a final burst of gunfire erupted from inside, and the man with the scar collapsed, his body jerking from the force of the bullets. Jack froze, his breath catching in his throat.

The weight of the world pressed down on him in that moment. He had been trying to run from it all this time, but the reckoning had come. And he wasn't sure he'd make it out alive.

The sound of another car's engine roared outside, closer now. Jack turned and sprinted for the woods. He wasn't sure what was coming next, but he knew one thing: he wasn't done fighting. Not yet.

THE END

The Moonshine Run

James O. Miller

Ovi eBook Publishing 2025

Ovi eBook Publishing
Design: Thanos

An Ovi eBooks Publication

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The headlights cut through the mist rolling in from Lake Ontario,.

THE MOONSHINE RUN

A HISTORICAL NOVEL

James O. Miller. After 23 years of high school teaching history and four years teaching in Germany retirement didn't come well especially since I hate gardening and golf. So I decided to exercise my imagination combined with my academic knowledge.

JAMES O. MILLER